

The Australian Universities' Review: A life (so far)

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The *Australian Universities' Review* began its life in 1958 as the *Federal Council Bulletin*, and was known as *Vestes* from 1958-1988. Simon Marginson's paper follows the fifty-year history of the journal and reviews a number of themes and trends from that history. References in the text relate to these publications by volume and number, without further specific reference to the journal's title at the time.

Introduction

The *Australian Universities' Review* (AUR) was born 50 years ago as the *Federal Council Bulletin* in February 1958, the roneoed newsletter of the national association for university staff in Australia. It appeared soon after the landmark report by Sir Keith Murray for the Menzies Government. 'First general impressions of the Murray report were that it opened up a new "golden age" for Australian universities', stated Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright from Sydney. 'The vital long-term merit of the report, promptly accepted by the Commonwealth government, is that it establishes firmly the principle of national responsibility for the universities'. (vol. 1, no. 1, 1958, p. 2).

It was a heady time. The same newsletter mentioned that the NSW Institute of Technology had been renamed the University of NSW and granted an Arts Faculty and a Medical School; and Melbourne's second university, 'The University of Victoria' (later Monash) had been announced. Five newsletters were issued that year by the voluntary national executive and secretariat. The last was titled *Vestes*, which became the main name of the journal for the next thirty years. From 1960 onwards it was perfect bound like a book

and carried a little advertising. The reference to a 'Bulletin' dropped from the masthead and was replaced by the subtitle *The Australian Universities' Review*.

Days of Wines and Vestes

The title *Vestes*, chosen after an 'exhaustive search', was taken from the statutes of Peterhouse College Cambridge where it described the robes of a scholar. 'We are indebted to many members for suggestions of a title', said the journal, 'particularly to Miss Wines of the Fisher Library in Sydney who spent some time investigating the problem before suggesting the name we have adopted' (vol. 1, no. 2, 1958, p. 2). No *Google* then.

From the beginning the journal exhibited certain typical traits. The Cambridge Latin title was emblematic of the derivative Australian university sector which for many years continued to imagine itself as an auxiliary to the British system. During the 1960s the regular column 'From our UK correspondent' read like a family letter. One suspects that it evoked much more interest than C P Fitzgerald's thoughtful piece on the state of Asian studies (vol. 3, no. 3, 1960, pp. 57-60) and the occasional papers on Indonesia or Japan. China behind the 'Bamboo Curtain' was closed to view.

At the same time the journal reflected a more open and democratic culture than that of its British forbears. It was widely distributed among staff in 1900 copies, a large magazine circulation in 1958. Contributions were encouraged so that it reflected the main currents of opinion on campus. It also showed a keen interest in questions of national education policy and to a lesser extent in working conditions. Salary figures in Newsletter 1 showed that Senior Lecturers were on £2100-2500 per annum.

'We are in the throes of the greatest expansion of universities in Australian history' said political economist Wheelwright, who edited the early issues, in early 1959. 'There is a host of problems crying out for discussion, and yet there exists no forum in which it can take place'. The Federal Council of University Staff was looking for a way in to the policy process. 'The 'problems' of an emerging mass higher education system included the participation rate (America's 30 per cent or the British 3 per cent?), the availability of academic staff, the student-staff ratio, teaching techniques for mass education, tutorial rooms, library facilities, teaching/research tensions, the likely failure rate, optimum campus size, more new universities, the possible abolition of tuition fees (vol. 1, no. 5, 1958, pp. 9 & 11).

The same edition carried a report of the Australian institute for Political Science Summer School on 'New Guinea and Australia'. It reported that 'Mr J R Kerr', lawyer, Queen's Counsel and former head of the Australian School of Pacific Administration, advocated the development of 'an independent federation of Melanesia', to include the whole of New Guinea, the Solomons, New Britain and New Ireland. 'But the situation will be decidedly complicated if the present Dutch New Guinea is incorporated into the Indonesian republic' (vol. 1, no. 5, 1958, p. 24).

The March 1960 issue carried an article by Labor MP Jim Cairns, former University of Melbourne academic and later Deputy Prime Minister in the Whitlam Government, on 'The government, the AUC and the universities'. Cairns said the financial needs of the universities were little understood. They were poor advocates for themselves. He urged them to drop their 'mild, confidential approach'. He also questioned the resolve of the Government. Prior to the appointment

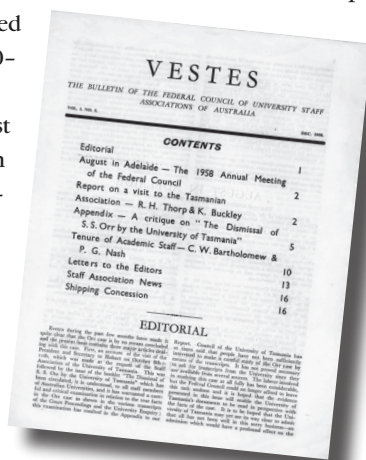
of Leslie Martin as Chair of the new Australian Universities Commission the Prime Minister had told him it was essential to 'get a chairman who will stand up to the Treasury'. Why should this be necessary, asked Cairns, if the government really supported the universities? But he warned that it would be essential for the AUC to exhibit 'facts, ability and courage' and to make those facts public (vol. 3, no. 1, 1960, pp. 11-13).

In May 1959 the President of the Federal Council had met with Leslie Martin. 'We are very favourably impressed' with Sir Leslie's speed and energy in establishing the AUC, said *Vestes* (vol. 2, no. 2, 1959, p. 1). The universities did well in the next few years. Perhaps Martin discovered how to deal with Treasury, though if so it stayed behind closed doors.

Problems related to growth dominate for most of the next two decades. The main issue was lack of staff. Not just budgets but absolute supply lagged behind student numbers. The 1960 student-staff ratio varied from 10.2 in Tasmania to 18.2 in Sydney. This compared an average of 9.0 among the AUC's seven UK comparators. There was concern about the size of tutorials in Australia, which ranged from 10-14 students.

The June 1960 issue carried a review by nuclear physicist Mark Oliphant of the Physical Sciences in Australian universities, one of a series in *Vestes* on each of the disciplines, paralleled by a series of articles on each of the individual universities. In another article Oliphant came out fighting on 'The quality of Australian universities'. The students were as good as any in the world, said Oliphant, but the senior staff was sorely deficient. The 'few first-class men' were being swamped by the mediocre. Not everyone endorsed this line of argument. Following Oliphant's article, *Vestes* ran ten pages of critical comment from seven senior academics, thereby confirming the opinions of both sides in the debate (vol. 3, no. 2, 1960, pp. 11-15 & p. 45ff).

In 1961 the Federated Council of Staff Associations and the Vice-Chancellors' Committee staged a Conference on Australian Universities. Over the next few years the National Union of Australian University Students joined the organisation of these conferences which concentrated attention on national policy issues. The report of the 1961 meeting contains some fascinating vignettes. Melbourne Economics Professor Wilfred Prest defended the provision of 'fringe subjects' such



as Accounting and Commercial Law in Economics Faculties. 'Nugget' Coombs from ANU expressed concern about quotas on student numbers, which substituted an 'aristocratic temper' in the universities in place of a democratic one. For Melbourne's Zelman Cowen, 'the committee system in universities is an abominable waste of talent... Many professors teach too little and write less. Going to committees breeds an appetite for more committees and destroys the capacity for sustained thought' (vol. 4, no. 3, 1961, pp. 51–55).

It was often today's issues that were played out but the scale was different. L F Crisp's review of Political Science revealed 2314 undergraduate students and 61 academic staff in Australia, including eight professors, but there were just nine politics PhDs in progress in four universities (vol. 5, no. 2, 1962, pp. 25–30). In the whole Australian university sector 230 PhDs were awarded in 1965 (vol. 8, no. 4, 1965, p. 246).

In 1965 came another landmark federal policy statement, the Martin report which established the binary system of higher education, comprising research universities and colleges of advanced education. The CAEs were earmarked for the main growth in student numbers. The report talked up national investment in human capital. The Martin report was generally applauded, except by some such as Sol Encel who were disquieted by its overt economic instrumentalism (vol. 8, no. 2, 1965, pp. 81–85). However, ANU's P H Partridge spotted the report's weakness. There was a lack of clarity about the 'basic concepts and principles' underpinning the structure of the binary system (vol. 8, no. 2., 1965, pp. 73 & 75). Within two decades the binary divide was at the point of collapse due to the upward drift of CAE programs to bachelor and masters levels.

The student revolt

There was a sense of gathering possibilities as the 1960s proceeded. Issues seemed to accumulate gravitas, the contributions became more reasoned and persuasive, and the conversation began to include a new generation of reformist student leaders such as Jim Spigelman from Sydney (later Whitlam's Principal Private Secretary and now Chief Justice of NSW). Articles were optimistic, intelligent, public spirited, serious minded and sometimes creative. On the whole they were good humoured as well. Women were being heard more often but were still heavily outnumbered.

In 1966 Wheelwright was succeeded by Harry Cowan, Professor of Architecture at Sydney, who

remained editor until 1979. Cowan had broad-ranging interests and an inclusive and non-didactic approach to debate. These were good years for *Vestes/AUR*. It had less competition from other journals than later developed and a more distinctively Australian approach was slowly being forged in its pages.

Despite an inclusive approach the journal had its hobby horses. Reflecting the social democratic strand in the staff associations, *Vestes* repeatedly floated proposals for extending access; not just by growing the number of university places, but through initiatives such as an open university along British lines, adult education, and a community college sector. TAFE was scarcely mentioned however.

Soon Cowan's values were to be tested. The September 1966 issue carried an article on the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, an early sign of the gathering storm. As American, European and Asian students radicalised, some of the *Vestes* contributors seemed disappointed that local campuses seemed to be so restrained.

In 1968 *Vestes* carried a supplement on student activism. It may have been a year too early. Richard Walsh, the International Vice-President of the National Union of Australian University Students, summarised the extraordinary upsurge of student participation in activist democratic politics abroad. He noted that in Australia there was sporadic and short-term involvement, with poor organisation and little unity among activists; though at least the representative student organisations had now established the right to take up larger political issues (vol. 11, no. 2, 1968, pp. 126–130). In 'The death of student politics' the Rector of St. Johns' College at Sydney noted that universities were conservative and Australia radicalism was confined to small groups of activists. But he feared that the widespread revolt in the United States would soon spread to Australia, and that it would be 'outside or even against the existing institutions, including those of traditional student politics' (vol. 11, no. 2, 1968, p. 133).

In the lead article Spigelman, the quintessential traditional student politician, provided a scholarly history of left activism since the 1920s (vol. 11, no. 2, 1968, pp. 107–119). Contemporary student movements, he said, were concerned with 'race relations and other moral issues such as capital punishment', and such as the two week freedom ride through indigenous settlements in country NSW. Activist energy in relation to the Vietnam war had increased, but not general student support for that activism. Membership of political

clubs on campus was very low. Compared to students of other countries Australian students might be more quiescent, though conclusive evidence on the comparison was lacking.

One possible explanation was the strong vocational ethos that had always been part of Australian university culture. There were more part-time students than in most countries, 40 per cent of the total, and they had a lower voting ratio in Student Representative Council elections. Another factor in 'the apparent inability to develop a broad university consciousness' was that more than two thirds of students lived at home rather than in residences on or near campus (vol. 11, no. 2, 1968, p. 117). Spigelman concluded that:

It would appear from this survey of the history of student activism in Australian universities and from the limited available sociological material that there is no real basis for an expansion of student activism. The vocational image of the university experience is, if anything, becoming stronger. Any feelings of alienation from the increasingly complex university are confined to a very small, and primarily left wing, minority.

The potential for any student movement exists in the very strong libertarian ethos in the student body on issues of civil liberties, censorship, capital punishment, race relations, etc. Activation of this ethos depends on the appearance of strong leaders from the left wing and radical Christian clubs. Even the most capable leaders would not, however, be able to sustain a long campaign. Activity would be issue orientated and short term. Its only impact on the political scene would be in gaining added publicity for a particular grievance (vol. 11, no. 2, 1968, p. 118).

Spigelman's focus on the religious left and libertarianism, and his by-passing of the Communist Party in the account of the period after world war two, were signs of an analysis developed in a Sydney influenced by the ethos of philosopher John Anderson, rather than in Melbourne where mainstream socialist currents had been more influential on campus. He was little aware of the student outlook in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, where there was action on issues such as the electoral

gerrymander in Queensland. The state capitals were separated worlds with little movement between them, though the National Union of Students fostered an

incipient national awareness among student leaders, and the anti-Vietnam war movement, led from outside the universities, was organising on a national basis.

What none of the 1968 contributors to *Vestes* realised was that the fire was soon to catch. Within two years Spigelman's analy-

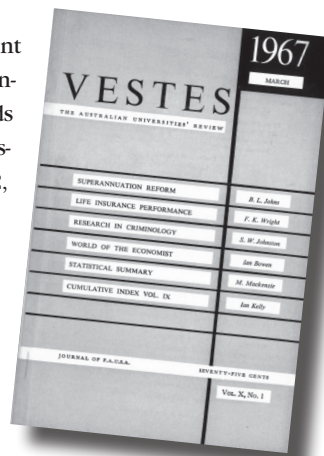
sis had been dramatically overturned. Political activism among students had followed its international counterparts, fostered by the 'counter-culture' in music and the arts, clothes, lifestyle and recreational drugs; it had gained broad student support on issues related to the Vietnam war and conscription; it had spilled well beyond official student government to radical clubs and movements; and it was turning inward in revolts against university administrations. The high-points of activism occurred more at the newer campuses such as Monash, and later La Trobe

and Flinders, rather than at Sydney and Melbourne. The University of Queensland also stood out, fostering a generation of rebels against the State's National Party government led by Joh Bjelke-Petersen, many of whom are now in positions of power in Queensland and in the nation.

Vestes stopped lamenting the absence of student activism. Correspondents sometimes supported it, sometimes bemoaned its excesses in Australia or abroad, for example Neville Meaney's disturbed account of the Zengakuren in Japan (vol. 12, no. 3, 1969, pp. 225-232). One mark of the period in the journal was a growing interest in US higher education, which became permanent. There was less interest in international students studying in Australia, mostly from Southeast and South Asia, though on some campuses they numbered more than 10 per cent of the student body.

In 1969 the journal produced a supplement on university autonomy. This perennial *Vestes* topic had become a touchstone for the student controversy. The editorial noted that 'two Cabinet Ministers have denied the right of the universities to autonomy if

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they cannot control their students' (vol. 12, no. 2, 1969, p. 101). In 'Autonomy and responsibility' Malcolm Fraser, Commonwealth Minister for Education and Science (and later Prime Minister) stepped carefully around this. He emphasised that the universities were 'profoundly integrated with the life of the community' and had become essential to it. Nevertheless, 'I want to emphasise,' said Fraser, 'that the Australian government has neither the intention nor the wish to dictate to the universities'. He affirmed that 'academic freedom should be absolute' in relation to 'the independent pursuit of knowledge'. Universities also had the right to select their staff and students. The last right was more qualified because it was 'accompanied by a responsibility for discipline in the university'. Universities were also accountable for their use of public funds (vol. 12, no. 2, 1969, pp. 102–106).

The future Governor-General Zelman Cowan agreed, though he emphasised that academics must be free to determine to follow their own lines of inquiry in research. 'If they fashion their research programs (and I have seen it done) to attract the fancy of foundation or government, they dishonour the principles of academic freedom which are the sole justification of the claim to university autonomy' (vol. 12, no. 2, 1969, p. 121). Spigelman agreed that autonomy was a means rather than an end. He argued that as well as academic freedom, autonomy should shelter the democratic political participation of students (vol. 12, no. 2, 1969, pp. 139–141).

But much the most incisive analysis was prepared by Bob Connell, then a research student in government at Sydney. Setting aside the usual homilies and absolutes, Connell noted that few officially funded research programs were free of government influence; while 'the relationship between the powers in government and the powers in the universities' was not one of conflict, nor one of control. It was one of 'symbiosis, with shared fundamental beliefs and an exchange of what each needs and the other can provide' (vol. 12, no. 2, 1969, pp. 141–149). Governments were still increasing university funding in those days.

Amidst the drama of the student revolt, *Vestes* maintained its core preoccupations with issues of funding, policy structures and coordination, staffing, facilities and modernisation. An ongoing concern was the poor working conditions and difficult career position of tutors and of demonstrators in the sciences. An emerging issue was 'the drift from science' among bright school leavers (vol. 15, no. 2, 1972, p. 202).

Like the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations (FAUSA) that published it, the journal saw itself as an advocate for reforms and innovations. In 1970 it was excited by the synchronous conduct of a seminar in both Cambridge and Edinburgh by 'telephone link' (vol. 13, no. 3, 1970, p. 311). In 1972 it reported that FAUSA had commissioned Barbara Falk at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at Melbourne to conduct a study of the desirability and feasibility of a distance-based open university in Australia (vol. 15, no. 2, 1972, p. 185). The same year it noted that the Monash University Faculty of Education had introduced a new Diploma of Tertiary Teaching for academics, (vol. 15, no. 1, 1972, p. 85) though this was later discontinued. *Vestes* carried occasional articles on teaching, which tended to the subjective; for example 'Teaching's my problem', (vol. 15, no. 3, 1972, p. 317).

Not every issue was addressed. The Executive reported to the 1970 AGM that plans for a 'Study Group on research needs in the social sciences and humanities' had collapsed 'because of difficulties in constituting a committee for the purpose'. The AGM resolved to 'take no further action in the matter' (vol. 13, no. 3, 1970, p. 297).

In 1972 the FAUSA AGM decided that the Association would produce a separate Federation Newsletter which would be more frequent than *Vestes*, dividing the two functions of association business and policy commentary that had been combined in 1958 and confirming the journal as a forum for footnoted articles. *Vestes* declared that this role was unique among academic associations in the English-speaking world.

Whitlam and Fraser

The spectacular events in government and tertiary education policy during the Whitlam years (1972–1975) had surprisingly little resonance in the pages of *Vestes*. No doubt one reason was that many policy-oriented academics were either providing inputs into government or working directly for it. Closer to the campuses, amid high inflation in 1973 Justice Campbell adjusted academic salaries in line with comparable professions in science and the public service. Senior Lecturers moved to \$11,900–13,900 and professors to \$18,600, increases of 21–22 per cent (vol. 16, no. 2, 1973, p. 145).

Vestes note that the FAUSA Executive 'has accepted Mr. Justice Campbell's report with satisfaction while reserving its opinion on certain sections thereof' (vol. 16, no. 2, 1973, p. 151). The relative level of academic

salaries in the first half of the 1970s, reflecting a belated general consensus about the need to strengthen the local and international supply of academic labour by lifting its price, were never to be reached again.

Cowan's successor was John Anwyl from Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education

who was sole editor from 1979–1989. Anwyl continued the generous-spirited approach to issues and contributors, encouraging young people and new ideas where he saw them. As the fields of academic development and policy consultancy developed in the later 1970s and 1980s

the journal played a central role in consolidating the specialist field of higher education studies in Australia. This might have diminished its role in constituting a community of discussion. Articles seemed to become more technical in preoccupation (those by the specialists), or more closed in argument and preoccupied with political symbols (those by the non-specialists).

Perhaps the times were changing again, with a dilution of the curiosity about public matters and the confidence in the value of free intellectual exchange that had characterised the 1960s, and a more performative approach to the print medium. Many now saw publication as a tool for advancing either ideologies or themselves.

The later 1970s saw a freeze on federal funding and the Fraser Government's partial revival of issues of state responsibility. The Whitlam Government had left the rationalisation of federal/state responsibilities incomplete, especially in the CAE sector, buying the growth of federal influence though funding rather than securing a stable transfer of powers and division of labour. For a time *Vestes* was preoccupied with federal/state coordination issues, including implications of the collapsing demand for teachers for teacher training. There opinions differed. Merv Turner at La Trobe felt that supply was being cut too far. Alan Barcan at Newcastle wanted teacher training out of the universities and into specialist Institute of Education with an expanded practicum that would operate concurrently with degree programs.

Terry Hore at Monash wrote about the problems of managing universities in a 'steady state' environment (vol. 22, no. 1, 1979, pp. 20–25) with few new academic appointments, the cessation of opportunities for young people, lack of academic mobility, and 'incremental creep'. The last term referred not to a slow

moving stalker but to the problem of growing costs relative to income in an ageing staff structure with annual salary progression. A year later Hore and colleagues published on publication rates and research productivity. It was a new theme that stepped close to academic prerogative (vol.

23, no. 2, 1980, pp. 32–37). Three years later *Vestes* published for the first time on private fund-raising by universities (vol. 26, no. 2, 1983, pp. 10–15).

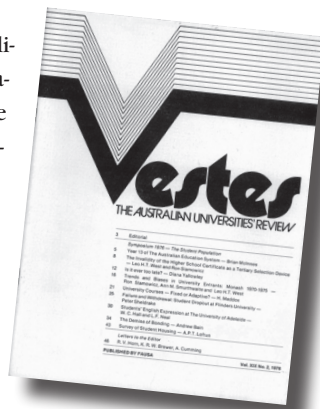
In 1979 Sydney Vice-Chancellor Bruce Williams delivered a three volume government-commissioned report into tertiary education. It was to have less immediate impact than the Murray and Martin reports but it, too, was a sign of its time. It focused on the relations between education and the labour market, gave overdue attention to TAFE and recom-

mended that the main enrolment growth should take place in TAFE and the CAEs. It had nothing to say about the gathering tensions on the university/CAE divide. It contained an appendix by Flinders economist Richard Blandy that recommended the return of student fees and the introduction of a graduate tax, the first of many blueprints for market reform. This generated much criticism, but equally important was the report's finding that the proportion of GDP spent on tertiary education could fall from 1.84 to 1.64 per cent. This confirmed Treasury's intention to begin winding down national investment.

In *Vestes*, reception of the Williams report was tepid. Former Labor Minister Kim Beazley noted that Treasury would 'pounce' on the suggestion for the return of fees (vol. 22, no. 2, 1979, pp. 5–7) though a graduate tax was absurd. Partridge found that 'it contains very little I would wish to disagree with, and at the same time there is not a great deal that is both novel and important' (vol. 22, no. 2, 1979, p. 8). Sol Encel contrasted

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Williams unfavourably with the OECD's more creative ideas about education and working life, which called not for a shift of enrolments from general education to tailored vocational programs as Williams implied, but the better integration of theory and practical experiences at all levels (vol. 22, no. 2, 1979, pp. 14-17).

The growing policy emphasis on relations between universities and the labour market had more than one implication. In 1981 Ralph Hall from NSW argued the case for the affiliation of FAUSA with the ACTU. He noted that the Federation of College Academics, covering the CAE sector, had already lodged an application to affiliate (vol. 24, no. 1, 1981, pp. 31-32).

Meanwhile the second wave of feminism was having a belated impact on the academic associations. Data from Adelaide Geography Professor Fay Gale (later Vice-Chancellor at WA) showed that in 16 Australian universities in 1977 there were only 12 female professors, 1.2 per cent of the professoriate. Women were 7.3 per cent of Senior Lecturers and 15.1 per cent of Lecturers (vol. 23, no. 1, 1980, pp. 3-4). Yet, as Jennifer Jones and Josie Castles later pointed out, in 1980 women constituted 43.9 per cent of university undergraduates, though only 28.0 per cent of higher degree enrolments (vol. 26, no. 2, 1983, p. 16). The inclusion of CAE data alongside the universities boosted the proportion of female students and staff in higher education.

More traditional *Vestes* preoccupations continued. In 1981 Glen Withers from Macquarie provided an overview of policy research centres in Australia. This was a welcome development providing it did not 'come at the expense of enduring values', he said (vol. 24, no. 2, 1981, p. 8). Bob Bessant from La Trobe, who was a member of the small editorial committee along with Andy Spaul from Monash and Les Wallis as General Secretary of FAUSA, argued that if universities wanted to maintain their autonomy they needed to be socially responsible and inclusive in the democratic sense (vol. 25, 1982, pp. 26-33). J H Eddle argued the case for a Northern Territory university on grounds of growth and the need for parity. One paragraph noted 'the special needs of Aborigines in the NT' (vol. 26, no. 1, 1983, p. 12).

Dawkins and after

The election of a new Labor Government under Bob Hawke in 1983 made little early difference to university policy, which at first continued to be led by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC). The first major change occurred in the industrial

sphere, when a 1985 High Court decision removed the impediments to industrial registration and unionisation in the education sector. FAUSA moved to adopt federal union status. Its secretariat grew.

Talk about the reintroduction of university fees was bubbling away in Canberra and from time to time the issue surfaced in *Vestes*. The finding by Don Anderson and others that the abolition of fees had done little to shift the socioeconomic composition of the student body (vol. 28, no. 1, 1985, pp. 20-23) (effects in relation to gender were largely overlooked) shook the commitment of social democratic contributors to Whitlam's free education reform. Staff associations and student unions remained adamantly opposed to fees.

Another emerging issue was the tensions along the binary line. Anwyl was sceptical about the desirability and feasibility of the binary system and encouraged debate. In 1985 CAE directors Don Watts from the WA Institute of Technology (later Curtin University of Technology), and Brian Smith from RMIT called for the extension of doctoral education to selected CAEs and a merger of the universities and advanced education councils under CTEC (vol. 28, no. 1, 1985, pp. 4-8). Two years later Watts and Smith became members of the 'Purple Circle' gathered by Minister Dawkins in 1987 to help shape his reforms. In the same 1985 issue of *Vestes* Roy Lourens from WA weighed in with a defence of the binary line, suggesting that there was 'a hidden agenda involving an attempted redirection of resources from universities and some colleges to a selected group of beneficiaries'. Lourens would not be asked to join the Purple Circle, which as it happened proved his point. Ken McKinnon of Wollongong canvassed community colleges and four year institutions along American lines; but like most commentators in *Vestes* he ignored TAFE. Perhaps the continued state administration of TAFE took it outside discussion of federal policy.

From time to time at the FAUSA annual meeting Anwyl was called on to save the journal from zealous cost cutters. Perhaps these all-too-frequent journeys to the brink persuaded him that modernisation was needed. *Vestes* adopted a new A4 size page in place of the small journal format it had been using since the early 1960s; and the sub-title *Australian Universities' Review* (AUR) went to the top of the masthead. These changes suggested more of a sense of magazine of commentary and less that of a specialist journal, though footnotes stayed, and the content did not alter much.

The Dawkins reforms of 1987–1989 dominated discussion in *AUR*. The creation of a unified national system of universities, absorbing the CAE sector through upgraded designations and mergers with existing universities, was paralleled by merger talks between the two unions covering academic staff in universities (FAUSA) and colleges of advanced education (FCA). Later, these forces were to join with three general staff unions to become the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). In the meantime a growing number of contributors from the CAEs were published in *AUR*. The Green Paper and White Paper issues of 1988 (vol. 31, no. 1 & 2, 1988) carried 18 articles on the reforms and were widely read.

On the Minister's reform package, the balance of opinion in *AUR* (especially the contributors from FAUSA) was hostile, though there was general support for the Dawkins plan to extend access to higher education. The main points of criticism were the government's adoption of an economic policy framework for higher education policy, particularly a neo-liberal framework; the implied threats to the autonomy of universities and to their research functions; the likelihood of regressive effects on the socioeconomic composition of institutions if substantial tuition charges were introduced; scepticism about the benefits of mergers and increased institutional size; and concerns about the 'clawback' of university resources to fund the new programs of grants for research by the Australian Research Council (ARC). Surprisingly, perhaps, there was only a muted defence of CTEC, which had long buffered the universities from direct interference. Dawkins abolished the CTEC and subsumed its functions into direct rule by the Commonwealth department.

There was much rattling of symbols in the debates about the Dawkins reforms. Sometimes the little noticed issues turn out to be more important in the long run. Tucked away at the back of the White Paper issue of *AUR* was a short article by Gerald Burke of Monash entitled 'How large are the cuts in operating grants per student?' [Reprinted in this issue of *AUR*, p. 14]. Burke noted that the planned increase in operating

funding of 9.5 per cent over 1989–1991 lagged behind the planned increase of 15 per cent in student numbers. Further, institutions would be only partly compensated for the common wage increase across the workforce, 1 per cent of operating grants were being deducted for a 'Reserve Fund' to assist with the costs

of mergers, and the deduction of university funds to finance the ARC programs would reach 4 per cent a year by 1991.

Burke found that overall there would be a cut of 8 per cent in operating grants per higher education stu-

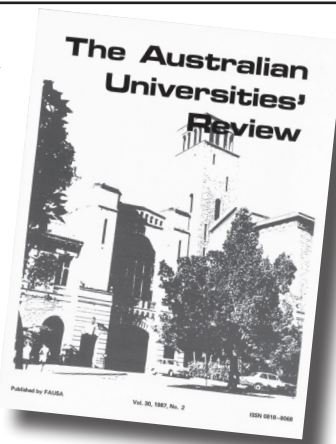
dent and 10 per cent in the universities, in just three years. This trend line, rather than argy-bargy about the binary system and the Idea of a University, was to be the harbinger of developments in the 1990s. The lesson that government could cut the universities and get away with it was not forgotten. Succeeding years saw the removal of full indexation of grants in 1995; then following the election of the Howard Government, the Vanstone cuts of 1997–2000. Meanwhile the price of tuition

climbed to among the highest in the world, though softened by income-contingent repayment, and eligibility for student assistance grants shrank.

Under both sides of politics, though more so under the Coalition parties, the financial settings resulted in an accelerated growth of international marketing as the one sure source of revenues; a blow out of more than 50 per cent in student-staff ratios; and the erosion of university capacity to support basic research. The older universities had sufficient resources to sustain their basic research programs, though with difficulty: they lost some ground in comparator universities in Canada and the UK. Universities in what is now the Innovative Research Universities grouping, always more dependent on public funds, came under great pressure. The post-1987 universities were never funded for a comprehensive mission in basic research.

In 1989 it was decided to abolish the single *AUR* editor. The journal passed into the hands of an editorial board chaired first by Lesley Johnson (1989–1995) and then Simon Marginson (1995–2000) and David Burchell (2001–2007). Anwyl stayed on the board

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until his retirement from Melbourne in 1995. The journal also sought to popularise itself to a degree. It sustained a mix of shorter comment pieces and longer scholarly articles, worked its program of theme editions hard, and used black and white and later colour graphics on the cover. Automatic distribution to every union member eventually became too costly and the journal moved to an 'opt in' situation.

Impact varied. Strong editions of the journal, and a handful of brilliant articles, some exhibiting stronger writing than in the heyday of *Vestes*, were interspersed with less exciting editions. Old *Vestes* themes recurred, such as the changing nature of academic work, research policy, accountability and university governance; as well as newer themes such as industrial relations (where John O'Brien from NSW was an important contributor) and problems of education markets and commodification.

Among the most popular editions of *AUR* in the 1990s were those with papers on the nature of the university by scholars like Raimund Gaita, Judy Brett, Janet McCalman (vol. 40, no. 2, 1997), Tony Coady and Freya Matthews. But it had become harder to produce the journal. *AUR* was now competing for readers with a larger range of sources of news and comment about higher education, including weekly Higher Education Supplements in *The Australian*. On the contributor side, policy commentary that went to the media had a much quicker impact than waiting for *AUR*. International journals were a more prestigious outlet for longer papers.

AUR received too much material that failed the grade elsewhere, and depended on solicitation to maintain quality. Burchell was an active chair and in the first half of 2000 *AUR* was often lively with a fresh and sometimes quixotic take on matters beyond the campus. But for almost two decades, delays and recourse to the expedient of double issues were too frequent. It was not until 2008 that one obvious remedy was adopted: the return to an editor, this time with honorarium attached.

Temper democratic, bias academic?

Overland, a Melbourne-based left of centre journal of books and cultural commentary whose life span paral-

els *Vestes/AUR*, carries the motto 'Temper democratic, bias Australian'. The phrase was drawn from a quote from Joseph Furphy in a letter to F Archibald of 4 April 1897:

'I have just finished writing a full-sized novel: title *Such is Life*; scene, Riverina and northern Vic; temper, democratic, bias, offensively Australian.'

If one was to sum up *AUR*, 'democratic' would be one of the terms to use. But in the fifty years of the journal, Australian identity is more implicit than is the case in Furphy's novel, and in the pages of *Overland*. We might say 'Temper democratic, bias academic' but this would beg the question of the 'Australian' academic.

In this, *Australian Universities' Review* has mirrored the local university sector. Australians run their own affairs, and inside and outside the universities they exhibit a cheerful patriotism that can be thoughtless but is mostly free of hubris. Geographic-cultural isolation has helped Australia to evolve a distinctive worldview. Arguably it is characterised by a communicative openness, by respect for merit and the moderation of status claims, an instinct for fairness and a gift for improvisation. It enables the civil reconciliation of diverse cultural habits in a modernising setting.

The absence of retarding traditions creates strategic freedom for Australians and their universities. In higher education this plays out both in the design of the local system, for example the invention of the HECS; and in global mission, for example the transnational education enterprises which span the ASEAN nations and China.

On the other hand this review of *Vestes/AUR* over 50 years would suggest that with shining exceptions from time to time, the higher education sector is mostly conformist, and often indifferent to creativity. Perhaps the typical Australian cynicism about expertise is a problem inside as well as outside higher education. This limits the potential of the universities. Do Australia's functional strengths in management, communications and public affairs nip its incipient critical intellectualism in the bud? Has the failure to put down deep cultural and intellectual roots in this land at this time, partly because the talent often flies the coop, left the field to unthinking local pragmatism? It is a chicken and egg question.

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One example is the muted impact of globalisation in the pages of the journal. Despite the intense engagement of Australian universities offshore in the last 15 years, which absorbed much energy among a minority of their personnel, there was little response to the sharp-minded discussions of international education in 1993 and 1998, (vol. 36, no. 2, 1993, pp. 16–20; vol. 41, no. 2, 1998) and the double issue on international higher education in 2000 (vol. 42, no. 2/vol. 43, no. 1, 1999/2000). It is likely the language in which those discussions were conducted, translated from cultural politics and critical policy studies, failed to broadly connect. There is also a sign here that while globalisation might be having transformative effects across the global sector, the academic culture Australia remains nationally bordered and has changed rather less.

The 'Australianness' in Australian intellectual identity remains surprisingly derivative. We are closer to a republic than we were, but we still steer with standard Anglo-American navigational aids along the English-language global routes. We have belatedly realised we are part of Asia but have yet to fully engage culturally.

Above all the campuses are unreflexive, except in relation to the kind of narrowly-defined institutional evolution called up by quality assurance, in which the prestige and incomes of the university-as-firm are the horizon of thought. Compare the current discussion

of policy in Australia with the richer conversation and fecund convergences in the Bologna process in Europe, and the fluorescence of universities in China and Singapore. Through changes in higher education the reflexive capacity of these societies is evolving rapidly, with incalculable long term consequences. Meanwhile we recycle Friedmanite funding schemes every half decade or so.

AUR is a creature of its context, more than vice versa. As the possibilities for Australian society and higher education open up, so will their discussion in *AUR*.

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